

Highland Park, IL. - Introducing the last three neurosurgeons caring for Lake County patients, Congressman Mark Kirk (R-Highland Park) highlighted the growing lack of doctors in Illinois. Dr. Jeffrey Cozzens, Dr. Sami Rosenblatt and Dr. Jonathan Citow joined Congressman Kirk calling on Congress to pass reforms to keep doctors practicing medicine here in Illinois.

"South of Springfield, there are no neurosurgeons treating patients suffering from head traumas," said Kirk. "This crisis of care is now spreading to Chicago's suburbs. With only three neurosurgeons caring for patients in Lake County, we face the growing threat that our doctors will not be there when we need them most. If we do not enact reforms soon, patients will die."

Physicians in key specialties -- obstetricians, neurosurgeons and emergency care -- are leaving Chicago's suburbs due to the rising costs of insurance for doctors. Illinois doctors are heading to Wisconsin and Indiana where malpractice reform laws keep the cost of insurance low. The average neurosurgeon in Wisconsin pays \$58,020 annually compared to over \$280,000 for the same neurosurgeon in Illinois.

Responding to the exodus of Illinois doctors, the American Medical Association placed our state on its National Warning List for declining access to care. By sharing a border with two reform states -- Wisconsin and Indiana - the Illinois problem is growing.

Other Illinois doctors are restricting the type of patients they serve. According to the Illinois State Neurological Society, over half of Illinois neurosurgeons limit their care for cranial and spine surgeries to lower insurance costs. Forty-two percent of Illinois neurosurgeons routinely transfer high-risk patients to other hospitals. Sixty-six percent of patients transferred require travel greater than 25 miles due to the declining number of Illinois neurosurgeons.

In 2004, 31 more Illinois neurosurgeons will restrict their practices, move to another state or retire early, leaving the 12 million people in 102 counties of Illinois with just 132 neurosurgeons left.

"The rising cost of insurance in Illinois would lead you to believe doctors are practicing medicine in the Dark Ages," said Kirk. "20-year data shows the cost of insurance rose 934 percent for

neurosurgeons. Rising insurance costs might indicate that neurosurgeons practicing today are 934 percent worse than their predecessors were 20 years ago. But with microsurgery and advanced imaging, we know that is not true.

Why are we driving good doctors from our state, and how do we stop the exodus?" **We know why: the average neurosurgeon in Illinois is sued by a personal injury lawyer every 18 months.**

To date, 25 states enacted reforms to help doctors care for patients. It costs less to insure a doctor in each of these states than in Illinois. Proposed malpractice reform legislation was killed last weekend by the Illinois legislature. This failure by our state leaders is forcing the federal government to take action. The U.S House of Representatives recently passed -- for the second time - a medical reform bill that includes caps on non-economic damages. The HEALTH act would place a \$250,000 cap on non-economic damages, impose limits on windfall lawyer contingency fees, apportion damage in relation to fault, and provide a guideline for the award of punitive damages. The bill is now before the U.S. Senate and President Bush said he would sign it.

"Despite our state-of-the-art hospitals, we cannot care for patients in Illinois without doctors," said Kirk.

Last year, Highland Park Hospital contacted Evanston Hospital over 90 times in need of a neurosurgeon. Based out of Evanston Hospital, Dr. Cozzens and Dr. Rosenblatt are the only two neurosurgeons who can serve patients at Highland Park Hospital. Dr. Citow, who serves Condell Medical Center and Lake Forest Hospital, is the only neurosurgeon actually based in Lake County. For three years, he tried to bring on a partner to help reduce his workload, but was not successful because of the unfriendly climate facing doctors in Illinois.

A recent Tribune article reported that "over 40,000 doctors" are licensed in Illinois. The article did not report that less than 19,000 of these doctors carry the insurance required to actually treat patients.